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THE ARTISTS' FUND SOCIETY.



CARELESSNESS of the future is becoming more and more a social crime. During several years past it has been remarked that professional men have become more and more active in establishing societies which, in some cases, are purely benovolent in character, and, in others, are similar to life insurance companies. Thus, we have the Actors' Fund, the Produce Exchange, the Stock Exchange and Post-Office societies; the lawyers, I believe, are organizing, and in the Navy there is one. One of the oldest and soundest of these institutions is the Artists' Fund Society of the City of New York.

It has been said that infants born during a storm become men of energy and renown. If this Society was not ushered into the world under these troublous atmospheric conditions, its infancy was, at least, passed in the midst of revolution and convulsion. The Society originated in misfortune, or, to speak more accurately, grew out of it. Mr. Ranney, the artist, died, leaving his family destitute. The painters of New York, then a small and disorganized body, made a collection of their own works, which were sold at auction for the benefit of the survivors of their unfortunate brother. F. E. Church contributed a small picture called "Morning in the Tropics," which brought \$625, the largest sum that, up to that time, had ever been given for a picture under the hammer in America. The proceeds of this fund were given to Mrs. Ranney; and, some of the artists, realizing the necessity of such a society as would prevent, in their cases, a recurrence of the event their charity commemorated, formed an organization to that end in 1859.

Some time was occupied in making a constitution and properly organizing for work. A great deal of trouble attended these preliminary movements. It was found, at first, impossible to harmonize the elements composing the new society. The President-elect resigned, the Vice-President declined to enter upon his duties, some five members withdrew, and the treasury was in debt. But the most hopeful of the pioneers did not despair. The constitution was revised, new officers elected, and, finally, in October, 1860, as twenty-five members had agreed to contribute, arrangements were made for the first exhibition.

The National Academy of Design gratuitously furnished three of their rooms for the use of the Fund. On the 6th of December, 1860, the exhibition opened, with forty-four contributions from forty-one members, together with 126 works by American artists, loaned for exhibition, the whole valued at \$20,000. After two weeks the rooms were cleared, and the sale took place on December 22d, in a building at the corner of Tenth Street

and Fourth Avenue. The result was encouraging. Picture buyers were sentimental in those days, and for the purpose of giving the Society a chance to start in life, made an effort to bid fairly for the works offered.

Every one who remembers the events of 1860 can understand what I refer to by the Society being born amid revolution and convulsion. The stormy presidential campaign of 1860 had just ended. Abraham Lincoln, the candidate of the Republican party, had been elected, and the Southern States were already arming and seceding from the Federal Union. An alarming and unprecedented state of affairs had burst upon us, and a general spirit of distrust and gloom pervaded the entire community. Exhibitions and sales of pictures contemplated by other parties had been abandoned or postponed. The Artists' Fund's venture was almost a forlorn hope. The amount of money expected and needed had not been received, but the result showed that the public stood ready to encourage the Society, and that it was destined to live; so, on the 13th of April, 1861, the Society was incorporated by the Legislature.

The year '61 was the most eventful, perhaps, in the history of the country, for with the first breath of spring came the shock of artillery, and soon the whole nation was engaged in the most terrible war of modern times. Still, the Society went on successfully, and at the end of the year stood favorably known to the public, out of debt, and with fifty members and a fund of \$5,000. The sale of 1862 realized \$3,376.50, an average of \$73.39 for each contribution. The average for the first year was \$50.82; for the second year, \$62.68. The sale of 1863 showed an average of \$76, and the Society now had over \$13,000 in its coffers. The war made money plentiful, and the artists, like other people, profited by the inflation. In 1864 the average at the sale was nearly \$85, and the balance in the treasury was \$20,349.80. This year Prof. Samuel F. B. Morse gave \$2,000 to the Society, an example which was afterwards followed by Mr. Edwin White, another artist, who left \$1,000 by his will, and Mrs. A. T. Stewart, who gave \$2,500. The Morse fund was made a separate investment, the donor desiring that no member of the profession needing assistance should be excluded from its benefits.

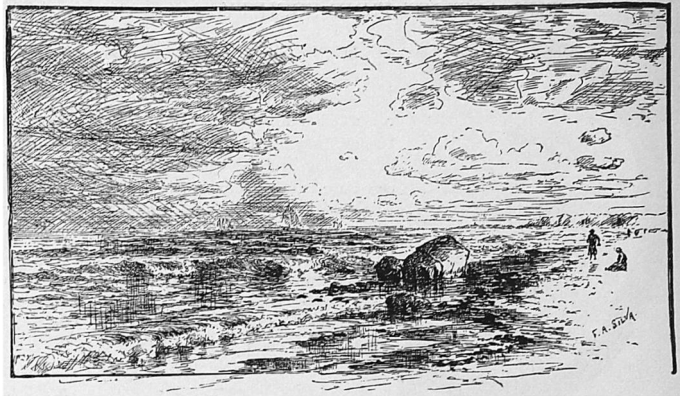
It had been customary to borrow a number of pictures in order to make as large and interesting exhibition as possible. An admission fee was charged, which went a long way towards paying the expenses of the Society; but after a few years this plan was abandoned, and the regular



M. F. H. DE HAAS.

free exhibitions of an auction sale took place. The Society undertook, in its early days, to pay to the family of a deceased member the sum of \$1,500. As the Society grew richer this was increased to \$2,500, and then to \$4,000. Besides this, there is a Benevolent Fund for the relief of artists not members of the Society, and a Relief Fund for the assistance of members in distress.

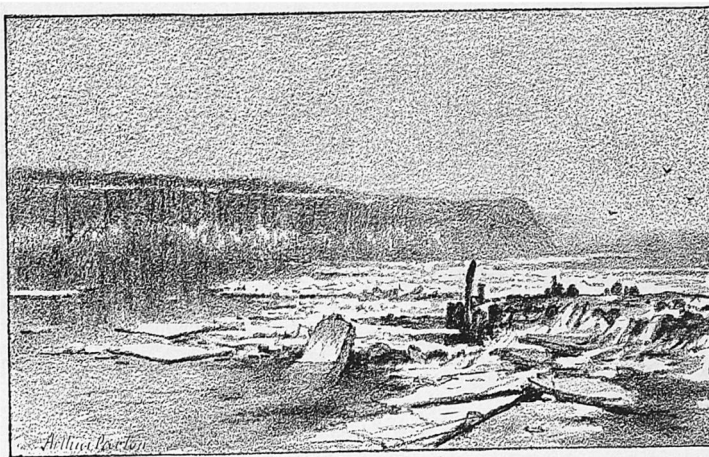
As the country emerged from its trouble the Artists' Fund Society began to rank as one of the moneyed institutions of the United States; but the depression which fell upon the country after the war, when gold was high and values unsettled, gave rise to some apprehension. The sales were not so satisfactory; members grew discontented; and, in fact, from that time there has been more or less discontent in the Association. Some of this must be charged to the account of certain works selling at so much less than their true value at the annual sales. In former times certain loans of art were wont to make a pool of money go to the sales and buy pictures, to divide among themselves afterwards, and they bought liberally. At that time picture auctions were rare, and foreign art had scarcely invaded the market. To-day, the important sales of fine pictures which are constantly occurring—sometimes five sales in one week—and the bewilderingments afforded by the collections of the dealers and public exhibitions, all combine to dwarf the Artists' Fund sale in importance. The old collectors, too, have passed away. People no longer go to help the cause, but to drive as hard a bargain as possible with the auctioneer. But, in spite of these changes, the average of merit and of price at the sales have increased, and the Fund grew until it became a fixed fact that the Society was safe. It was noticed that in the fluctuations during the return to specie payments, after the war, common merchandise suffered a reduction of thirty to fifty per cent., while pictures—luxuries, as they are termed—fell only



FRANCIS A. SILVA.



J. FRANCIS MURPHY.



ARTHUR PARTON.

twenty per cent. They were dark days for the Society while the country was slowly recovering from the effects of the great war, and using so much money in bridging the great West with steel rails to wed the Atlantic with the Pacific and connect our commerce with the Orient. But the interest of the Fund had increased its capital steadily, and death had spared its members to such an extent that there had been but a slight drain upon its treasury.

Within the last few years there has been considerable discussion in the Society in regard to the question of sales. It was proposed by some to abandon them altogether, to allow no more members to enter the Society, and to use the funds to pay the insurances as fast as deaths occurred. Others proposed to divide the funds among the members, in

proportion to the amounts they had contributed. After several experts had given their opinions, and different committees and individual members had investigated and reported, and many meetings had been held, it was resolved to keep on as before, as that was considered the wisest plan.

A reporter in one of the daily papers, referring to some of the transactions of this Society not long ago, wrote that "artists and art societies are as children in matters of business." This young man was only following the popular but erroneous idea, that to be an artist disqualifies a man for all of the serious affairs of life. It is a fact that the three principal art societies of this city, *viz.*, the National Academy, the Artists' Fund and the Water Color Society, are very ably managed—better than many of the financial institutions of this country. The Academy is sixty years old, is out of debt, has a fine building and funds in bank. The Artists' Fund is the richest art society in the world, and more thoroughly solvent than any life insurance company in this country; and the Water Color Society is in a very independent condition. Whenever laymen have attempted to assist in their management

trouble took place, but when the artists controlled all went safely. Artists, as a rule, are exceedingly cautious, and unwilling to take the risks business men so often assume and come to ruin. It would be difficult to find any institution in this country that has been so ably and carefully managed as the Artists' Fund Society; and, strange to say, it has been since its start mainly in the hands of the same set of men, and still it has not developed into a "ring." The Society has passed its sentimental age, and has become a cold, serious business institution, as much—and more so—than many of our banks. Each member must be ready with his contribution at the date ordered, or pay his one hundred dollars in cash, or lose his membership. Each is obliged to contribute for twenty-five years, and then go on the retired list. Several of the old members go out this year, and their works will no longer engage the auctioneer. Meanwhile, new blood must come into the Society; and of late years it has gained in membership some of the strongest young painters of this city, and its condition is as sound as it is possible for human institutions to be. May it live long, and prosper!

FRANCIS A. SILVA.

A NEW SKETCHING GROUND.

MESSRS. Reichard & Co. last month held an exhibition in their Fifth Avenue gallery of thirty-two water colors by Henry W. Ranger. Mr. Ranger is a native of this State, and, like a great many American talents, young and old, owes his place in art entirely to his own efforts. He is the son of a Syracuse photographer, and began his active career in life in his father's gallery, where he became known as an artistic and expert poser. His natural predilection for art, fostered by his surroundings, impelled him to throw up the business after some years, in which all of his spare time was devoted to study from nature, and he launched himself upon his present career with the opposition of his family and the encouragement usual to a beginner in art in this or any other country.

His first work of any importance was done in black and white, and was noteworthy chiefly for photographic fidelity and minuteness of detail. A chance meeting with the late A. F. Bellows during a summer at Glen Haven, some eight years ago, set him on the right track. His work in water colors began to find a sale, and in 1881 he came to New York. Here he established himself, painting in water colors, and exhibiting with increasing success. A couple of years ago he began summering in Canada, utilizing the quaintly picturesque material so abundant in and around Quebec to excellent results. A marked change in his style, due to his study of the Dutch water colorists, gives his later work added interest and value. Thanks to this and to the novel material

afforded him by his summer sketching ground, his recent exhibition proved an exceptionally attractive one to the public.

Its interest was enhanced by the revelation it made of a new and hitherto unexplored region, one of those odd corners of

the continent which seems to have been specially preserved, if not created, for the artist. A number of his sketches were drawn from the Isle de Grue, which, in the pretty catalogue prepared by him for his exhibition, he calls "a bit of old France," and thus quaintly describes:

"Crane Island (Isle de Grue) is in the middle of the St. Lawrence River, fifty miles below Quebec, and ten miles from either shore. It was one of the early Seigneuralty grants by Louis XIV. in New France, and was peopled by the honest Breton peasants, whose habits and houses remain here unchanged by modern progress. The people live and die in the belief that Quebec is the centre of the world, and that London, Paris and New York are more than half myths. Only two important events have happened in its local history: the wreck of the French frigate 'l'Eléphant,' in 1729, and the visit of a wandering peddler who, in 1822, called at the



THIBITOUT'S DOCK, QUEBEC.



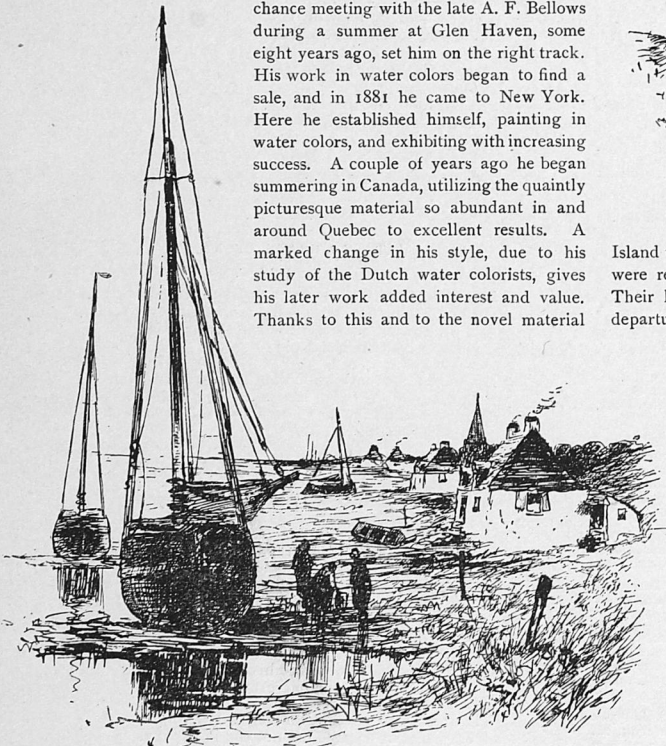
CRANE ISLAND'S ONLY ROAD.

Island with a stock of red paint. The artists who explored these shores were regarded as harmless lunatics, whose vagaries should be humored. Their labors were watched with deep and mystified interest, and their departure hailed with a kindly, old-fashioned farewell."

It is likely, after the revelation Mr. Ranger has made of its possibilities, that Crane Island will become better known to our exhibitions in the future.

WHILE I believe that dilettantism is the curse of art, I also believe that the steady spread of the fancy for artistic study among our better classes is a sign to be hailed with gratification by all lovers of art for its own sake. You cannot expect people to appreciate pictures until they understand them, and the nearer they come to discovering how they are made, the nearer they will come to a comprehension of what is good in them. All this muddling of colors on canvas and paper, and bedaubing of papier maché pots and clay vases, is part of a liberal education. It is not likely to develop many talents, but it will develop an appreciation of talent by which the real artist will be benefited.—*To-Day*.

C. KLACKNER has published a large and handsome etching by James S. King, after a picture by Clement R. Grant, called "Waiting." The sentiment of the subject is charmingly worked out, and the etching is executed with skill and delicacy.



FISHERMAN'S HOUSE, CRANE ISLAND.